

THE VOICE OF ALASKA'S CAPITAL SINCE 1912

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2018

JUNEAU EMPIRE



WEATHER | Snow at times, accumulating 2-4"; High 34, Low 22 | B8

THE COMICS | B3

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A WATERY WORLD

Goade wins award. CCW. Inside.

JUNEAU TO D.C.

Local youth swimmer invited to swim meet in the capital. B1.

NEW 'PLACE-BASED' SCIENCE CURRICULUM

K-5 to have lessons revamped in 2019. A5.



MICHAEL PENN | JUNEAU EMPIRE

Rep. Sam Kito III, D-Juneau, right, speaks alongside Marc Luiken, Commissioner of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities during a breakout session on Alaska Marine Highway System Reform at Southeast Conference at the Elizabeth Peratrovich Hall on Wednesday.

Backers of ferry reform seek help from state lawmakers

Juneau representative preparing bill that would outline future of Alaska Marine Highway System

By ALEX McCARTHY
JUNEAU EMPIRE

The movement to reform the Alaska Marine Highway System is reaching a critical point as proponents meet with legislators this week.

The plan for reforming the ferry system, which has suffered from budget cuts in recent years, is to turn it into a public corporation instead of part of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. It's based generally on the way the Alaska Railroad is run.

A key part of doing this would be to secure "for-

ward funding" for the ferry system, meaning that the AMHS could plan its budgets 18-24 months ahead of time instead of trying to set a schedule without knowing exactly what the budget will be.

During a breakout session at the Southeast Conference's Mid-Session Summit on Wednesday, the AMHS Reform Steering Committee met and looked at the next steps in its process.

Rep. Sam Kito III, D-Juneau, said in September that he would draft a bill to get increased funding for the ferry system. At Wednes-

day's meeting, Kito gave an update on his progress. The bill should be ready "any day," Kito said, adding that it sets the table for reforming the ferry system.

"We think we've got something that actually will create a very sustainable marine highway system," Kito said. "It's definitely going to be the starting point. The reason that we didn't want to start pushing too far out is we didn't want people wrapped around the axle on specific details that could be controversial."

One of the items outlined in the bill is the appointment of a board comprised of members with "expertise" in the ferry system. They would have to have

specific affiliations, such as the shipping industry or a background in large marine vessels. Susan Bell, principal at the McDowell Group, said this board is a vital part of the possible future of the corporation. It will require more thought, she said, to determine how exactly to organize the board.

While the ferry system isn't expected to break down, Elliott Bay Design Group (which has assisted in putting the reform plan together) Chief Concept Engineer John Waterhouse said the system is in a tough spot.

The M/V Malaspina is still being repaired, long after its expected return to ser-

SEE AMHS | Page A8

SEE MINE | Page A4

Republicans reject Walker's pick for Senate

Governor has 10 days to select a new option for seat vacated by Mike Dunleavy

By JAMES BROOKS
JUNEAU EMPIRE

Randall Kowalke was in his church's parking lot at 8:30 a.m. when he got a call from Gov. Bill Walker.

It wasn't the call he was hoping for.

In a closed-door meeting Wednesday morning, Alaska Senate Republicans rejected Walker's pick of Kowalke for a senatorial seat vacated by the

resignation of Wasilla's Mike Dunleavy.

"I went into the service, and I prayed for the governor, I prayed for the Senate, I prayed for the people of District E, and I prayed for Alaska," Kowalke said of his reaction to the governor's news.

Walker now has 10 days to name another candidate for the job. In the meantime, the Senate continues operating with

19 members.

State law and the Alaska Constitution give a sitting governor 30 days to select someone to fill a legislative vacancy. That person must then be confirmed by those of the same political party who are already in the appropriate Legislative house. The governor can select anyone who is of the same political party as the person being replaced, as long as they meet the constitutional qualifications for the job.

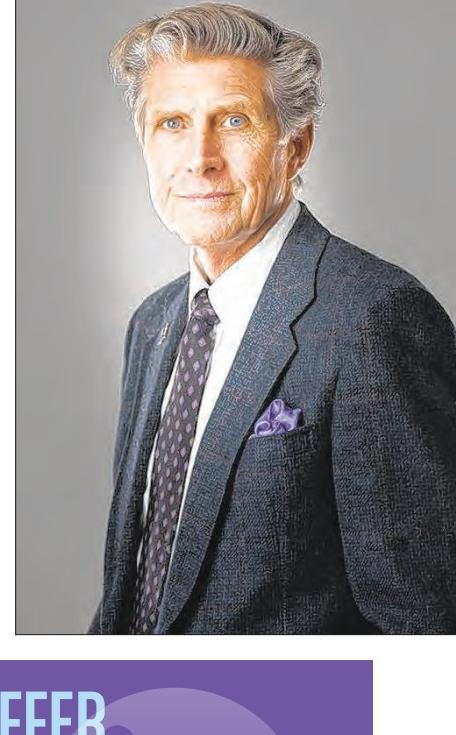
The Republican and Democratic parties in

Alaska have come up with procedures to help the governor choose someone acceptable. Those procedures allow local Republicans and Democrats to select a short list of candidates. That list is then forwarded to the governor.

Kowalke, a Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assemblyman, wasn't among the three nominees suggested to the governor by District E Republicans.

In a Tuesday letter to

SEE PICK | Page A8



Mat-Su Borough Assemblyman Randall Kowalke is seen in this undated portrait provided by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

COURTESY PHOTO



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